

A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

On OCCASION of the DEATH of the

Rev. Mr. JOHN FLETCHER,

VICAR OF M. DEIEY, SHROPSHIRE.

By JOHN WESLEY, A.M.

L. Fletcher

L O N D O N:Printed by JOHN PARAMORE, at the Foundry,
Upper-Moorfields, 1785.



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To the R E A D E R.

IT was a consciousness of my own Inability, to describe in a manner worthy of the Subject, such a Person as Mr. *Fletcher*, which was one great reason of my not writing this sooner. I judged, only an *Apelles* was proper to paint an *Alexander*. But I at length submitted to Importunity, and hastily put together some Memorials of this great Man: intending, if God permit, when I have more Leisure and more Materials, to write a fuller Account of his Life.

JOHN WESLEY.

LONDON,

Nov. 9, 1785.

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P S A L M xxxvii. 37.

*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright,
for the end of that man is peace.*

IN the preceding verses taken together with this, there is a beautiful contrast, between the death of a wicked and that of a good man. *I myself, says the Psalmist, have seen the ungodly in great power, and flourishing like a green bay-tree. I went by, and lo! he was gone: I sought him, but his place could no where be found.* Dost thou desire to be found happy, both in life and in death? Then *keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that shall bring a man peace at the last.* The words are rendered in the new translation, with far more force and elegance. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright! For the end of that man is peace.* It is not improbable that *David*, while he uttered these words, had a particular instance before his eyes. Such an instance was that of the great and good man, whom God has not long ago taken to himself.

In discoursing on these words, I purpose first, briefly to enquire, who is the person that is here spoken of, *the perfect, the upright man?* I will endeavour, secondly to explain the promise, *That shall bring a man peace at the last:* or as it

is exprest in the other version, *The end of that man is peace.* I will then, with the divine assistance, shew a little more at large, in how glorious a manner it was fulfilled in the end of that *perfect and upright man* who has been lately removed from us.

I. 1. I am first, briefly to enquire, who is the person that is here spoken of, *the upright and perfect man*? In speaking on this head, I shall not endeavour to describe the character of an upright Jew; such as *David* himself was, or any of those holy men that lived under the Mosaic Dispensation: it more nearly imports us to consider such an upright man, as are those that live under the Christian Dispensation, such as have lived and died since *life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel.*

2. In this sense, he is a perfect and upright man, who believes in the name of the Son of God: he is one in whom it has pleased the Father, to reveal the Son of his love; and who consequently is able to declare, *the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* He is one that finds *the Spirit of God witnessing with his spirit, that he is a child of God:* and unto whom *Jesus Christ is made of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

3. This faith will undoubtedly *work by love.* Accordingly every Christian Believer has *the love of God shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him.* And loving God, he loves his Brother also: his goodwill extends to every child of man. By this, as well as by the fruits of love, lowliness, meekness, and re-

signation,

signation, he shews that there is the same *mind* in him, *which was in Christ Jesus*.

4. As to his outward behaviour, the upright Christian Believer, is blameless and unreprouvable. He is holy, as Christ that has called him is holy in all manner of conversation; ever labouring to *have a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward man*. He not only avoids all outward sin, but *abstains from all appearance of evil*. He steadily walks in all the public and private ordinances of the Lord blameless. He is zealous of good works; as he hath time doing good, in every kind and degree, to all men. And in the whole course of his life, he pursues one invariable rule, *whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, to do all to the glory of God*.

II. And surely *the end of this man is peace*: the meaning of which words we are now, in the second place to consider.

I do not conceive this immediately to refer to that glorious Peace, which is prepared for him in the presence of God to all eternity: but rather to that which he will enjoy in the present world, before his spirit returns to God that gave it. Neither does it seem directly to refer to outward peace or deliverance from outward trouble: although it is true, many good men, who have been long buffeted by adversity, and troubled on every side, have experienced an entire deliverance from it, and enjoyed a remarkable calm before they went hence. But this seems chiefly to refer to inward peace, even that *peace of God which passeth all understanding*. Therefore it is no wonder, that it cannot be fully and adequately expressed in human language. We can only say, it is an unspeakable calmness and serenity

renity of spirit, a tranquility in the blood of Christ, which keeps the souls of Believers in their latest hour, even as a garrison keeps a city; which keeps not only their hearts, all their passions and affections, but also their minds, all the motions of their understanding and imagination, and all the workings of their reason in *Christ Jesus*. This peace they experienced in a higher or lower degree (suppose they continued in the faith) from the time they first found redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins. But when they have nearly finished their course, it generally flows as a river, even in such a degree, as it had not before entered into their hearts to conceive. A remarkable instance of this, out of a thousand, occurred many years ago. *Enoch Williams*, one of the first of our Preachers that was stationed at *Cork* (who had received this peace when he was eleven years old, and never lost it for an hour) after he had rejoiced in God with joy unspeakable, during the whole course of his illness, was too much exhausted to speak many words, but just said "Peace! Peace!" and died.

III. So was the Scripture fulfilled. But it was far more gloriously fulfilled in that late eminent servant of God; as will clearly appear if we consider a few circumstances first of his life, and secondly, of his triumphant death.

1. Indeed we have as yet but a very imperfect knowledge of his life. We know little more of his early years, than that he was from his infancy so remarkably regardless of food, that he would scarce take enough to sustain life: and that he had always much of the fear of God, and a real sense of religion. He was born September

tember 12, in the year 1729, at *Nyon*, in *Switzerland*, of a very reputable family. He went through the usual course of academical studies, in the University of *Geneva*. One of his Uncle's who was at that time a General Officer in the Imperial service, then invited him into the same service, promising to procure him a commission. But just as he came into *Germany*, the war was at an end. Being so far on his way, he was then invited into *Holland*, by another Uncle, who had a little before been desired by a correspondent in *England*, to procure a Tutor for a Gentleman's sons. He asked Mr. *Fletcher* whether he was willing to go into *England*, and undertake this office? He consented, and accordingly went over to *England*, and undertook the care of Mr. *Hill's* two sons, at *Tern*, in *Shropshire*: and he continued in that office, till the young gentlemen went to the University.

2. When Mr. *Hill* went up to *London*, to attend the Parliament, he took his Lady and Mr. *Fletcher* with him. While they were dining at *St. Alban's*, he walked out into the town, but did not return, till the coach was set out for *London*. However a saddle-horse being left, he came after, and overtook them on the same evening. Mrs. *Hill* asking him, "Why he stayed behind?" He said, "I was walking through the market-place, and I heard a poor old woman talk so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time past away." "I will be hanged, said Mrs. *Hill*, if our Tutor does not turn Methodist by and by!" "Methodist, Madam, said he, pray what is that?" She replied, "Why, the Methodists are a people that do nothing but pray. They are praying all day and all night." Are they, said he? "Then with the help

help of God, I will find them out, if they be above ground." He did not long after find them out and had his desire, being admitted into the Society. While he was in town he met in Mr. *Richard Edwards's* Class, and lost no opportunity of meeting. And he retained a peculiar regard for Mr. *Edwards*, to the day of his death.

3. It was not long before he was prest in spirit, to call sinners to repentance. Seeing the world all around him lying in wickedness, he found an earnest desire

" To pluck poor brands out of the fire,
To snatch them from the verge of hell."

And though he was yet far from being perfect in the *English* tongue, particularly with regard to the pronounciation of it, yet the earnestness with which he spake, seldom to be seen in *England*, and the unspeakably tender affection to poor, lost sinners which breathed in every word and gesture, made so deep an impression on all that heard, that very few went empty away.

4. About the year 1753, (being now of a sufficient age) he was ordained Deacon and Priest, and soon after presented to the little Living of *Madeley*, in *Shropshire*. This, he had frequently said was the only Living which he ever desired to have. He was ordained at *Whitehall*, and the same day, being informed that I had no one to assist me at *West-Street* Chappel, he came away as soon as ever the Ordination was over, and assisted me in the administration of the Lord's Supper. And he was now doubly diligent in preaching, not only

in the Chappels of *West-Street* and *Spitalfields*, but wherever the Providence of God opened a door to proclaim the everlasting Gospel. This he did frequently in *French* (as well as in *English*) of which all Judges allowed him to be a compleat Master.

5. Hence he removed into the Vicarage-House at *Madeley*. Here he was fully employed among his parishioners, both in the town and in *Madeley Wood*, a mile or two from it, a place much resembling *Kingswood*, almost wholly inhabited by poor Colliers, and their numerous families. These forlorn ones, (little wiser than the beasts that perish) he took great pains to reform and instruct. And they are now as judicious and as well-behaved a people, as most of their station in the three kingdoms.

6. But after some time he was prevailed upon by the Countess of *Huntingdon*, to leave his beloved retreat, and remove into *Wales*, in order to superintend her School at *Trevecka*. This he did, with all his power, instructing the young men both in learning and philosophy: till he received a letter from the Countess, together with the circular letter, signed by Mr. *Shirley*, summoning all that feared God in *England* to meet together at *Bristol*, at the time of the Methodist Conference, "in order to bear testimony against the dreadful heresy contained in the Minutes of the preceding Conference." Her Ladyship declared, that all who did not absolutely renounce those Eight Propositions which were contained in the Minutes of that Conference, must immediately leave her house. Mr. *Fletcher* was exceedingly surpris'd at this peremptory declaration. He spent the next day

day in fasting and prayer, and in the evening wrote to her Ladyship, that he not only could not utterly renounce, but must entirely approve of all those Eight Propositions, and therefore had obeyed her order, by leaving her house, and returning to his own at *Madeley*.

7. That circular letter was the happy occasion of his writing those excellent *Checks to Antinomianism*, in which one knows not which to admire most, the purity of the language, (such as a foreigner scarce ever wrote before) the strength and clearness of the argument, or the mildness, and sweetness of the spirit, which breathes throughout the whole. Insomuch that I nothing wonder at a Clergyman that was resolved never to part with his own Opinion, who being prest to read them, replied, "No, I will never read Mr. *Fletcher's* Writings: for if I did, I should be of his mind." He now likewise wrote several other valuable Tracts. Mean time he was more abundant in his ministerial labours, both in public and private, visiting his whole parish, early and late, in all weathers, regarding neither heat nor cold, rain nor snow, whether he was on horseback or on foot. But this insensibly weakened his constitution, and sapped the foundation of his health; which was still more effectually done, by his intense and uninterrupted studies: at which he frequently continued with scarce any intermission, fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen hours a day. Mean time he did not allow himself necessary food: he seldom took any regular meals, unless he had company: but twice or thrice in four and twenty hours, ate some bread and cheese, or fruit: instead of which he sometimes took a draught of milk, and then wrote on again.

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When one reproved him for this, for not allowing himself a sufficiency of necessary food, he replied with surprise, "Not allow myself food? Why our food seldom costs my Housekeeper and me, less than two shillings a week."

8. Being informed that his health was greatly impaired, I judged nothing was so likely to restore it as a long journey. So I proposed his taking a journey with me into *Scotland*, to which he willingly consented. We set out in the Spring, and after travelling eleven or twelve hundred miles, returned to *London* in Autumn. I verily believe, had he travelled with me a few months longer, he would have quite recovered his health. But being stopped by his friends, he quickly relapsed, and fell into a true pulmonary Consumption.

9. But this sickness was not unto death. It was only sent that the glory of the Lord might appear. During the whole course of it he remained at *Newington*, and was visited by persons of all ranks. And they all marvelled at the grace of God that was in him. In all his pain, no complaint came out of his mouth: but his every breath was spent, either in praising God, or exhorting and comforting his neighbour.

10. When nothing else availed, he was advised to take a journey by sea and by land into his own country. He did this, in company with Mr. *Ireland*, a well tried and faithful friend who loved him as a brother, and thought no pains ill bestowed, if he could preserve so valuable a life. He resided in his own country about a year, and was a blessing to all that were round about him. Being much recovered, he

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spent

Spent some months in *France*, and then returned in perfect health to *Madeley*.

11. In the year 1781, with the full approbation of all his friends, he married Miss *Bosanquet*: of whom, as she is still alive, I say no more at present, than that she was the only person in *England*, whom I judged to be worthy of Mr. *Fletcher*. By her tender and judicious care, his health was confirmed more and more. And I am firmly convinced, that had he used this health, in travelling all over the kingdom, five, or six or seven months every year (for which never was man more eminently qualified; no, not Mr. *Whitefield* himself) he would have done more good, than any other man in *England*. I cannot doubt but this would have been the more excellent way. However, though he did not accept of this honour, he did abundance of good in that narrow sphere of action which he chose: and was a pattern well worthy the imitation of all the Parochial Ministers in the kingdom.

12. His manner of life during the time that he and his wife lived together, it may be most satisfactory to give in her own words.

"It is no little grief to me, that my dearly beloved husband has left no account of himself in writing. And I am not able to give many particulars of a life the most angelic I have ever known."

"He was born at *Nyon*, in the Canton of *Berne* in *Switzerland*. In his infancy he discovered a lively genius, and great tenderness of heart. One day, having offended his father, who threatened to correct him, he kept himself at a distance in the garden, till seeing his father approach

approach, and fearing his anger would be renewed by the sight of him, he ran away. But he was presently struck with a deep remorse, thinking, "What! Do I run away from my father? What a wicked wretch! May be I may live to grow up and have a son that will run away from *me*!" And it was some years before the impression of sorrow, then made upon him wore off.

"When he was about seven years old, he was reprov'd by his nurse-maid saying, "You are a naughty boy, and the devil takes all such." After he was in bed, he began to reflect on her words, his heart smote him, and he said, "I am a naughty boy, and perhaps God will let the devil fetch me away." He got up on the bed, and for a considerable time, wrestled with God in prayer, till he felt such a sense of the love of God, as made him quite easy.

(Part of the next paragraph I omit, being nearly the same with what I inserted before.)

"When he entered Mr. *Hill's* family, he did not know Christ in his heart. One Sunday evening, as he was writing some music, the servant came in to make up the fire, and looking at him said, "Sir, I am very sorry to see you so employed on the Lord's day." He immediately put away his music, and from that hour became a strict observer of that holy day.

"Not long after he met with a person, who asked him, to go with her and hear the Methodists. He readily consented. The more he heard, the more uneasy he grew: and doubling his diligence, he hoped by *doing much* to render himself acceptable to God: till one day hearing Mr. *Green* he was convinced, he did not know

what true faith was. This occasioned many reflections in his mind. "Is it possible (said he) that I who have made divinity my study, and have received the *premium of piety* (so called) from the University for my writings on divine subjects; that I should still be so ignorant, as not to know what Faith is!" "But the more he examined, the more he was convinced: then sin revived, and hope died away. He now fought by the most rigorous austerities to conquer an evil nature, and bring heaven-born peace into his soul. But the more he struggled, the more he was convinced, that all his fallen soul was sin, and that nothing but a revelation of the love of Jesus could make him a Christian. For this he groaned with unwearied assiduity: till one day, after much wrestling with God, lying prostrate on his face before the throne, he felt the application of the blood of Jesus. Now his bonds were broken, and his free soul began to breathe a pure air. Sin was beneath his feet, and he could triumph in the Lord, the God of his salvation.

"From this time he walked valiantly in the ways of God: and thinking he had not leisure enough in the day, he made it a constant rule, to sit up two nights in a week, for reading, prayer and meditation, in order to sink deeper into that communion with God, which was become his soul's delight. Mean time he took only vegetable food, and for above six months, lived wholly on bread, with milk and water.

"Notwithstanding the nights he sat up, he made it a rule, never to sleep, as long as he could possibly keep awake. For this purpose, he always took a candle and book to bed with him. But one night being overcome of sleep,

before

before he had put out the candle, he dreamed his curtains, pillow, and cap were on fire, without doing him any harm. And so it was. In the morning, part of his curtains, pillow and cap, were burnt. But not an hair of his head was singed. So did God give his angels charge over him!

"Sometime after he was favoured with a particular manifestation of the love of God: so powerful, that it appeared to him, as if body and soul would be separated. Now all his desires centred in one, that of devoting himself to the service of his precious Master. This he thought he could do best, by entering into Orders. God made his way plain, and he soon after settled in *Madeley*. He received this parish as from the immediate hand of God, and unweariedly laboured therein, and in the adjacent places, till he had spent himself in his Master's service, and was ripening fast for glory. Much opposition he met with for many years, and often his life was in danger. Sometimes he was inwardly constrained to warn obstinate sinners, that if they did not repent, the hand of God would cut them off. And the event proved the truth of the prediction. But notwithstanding all their opposition, many were the seals of his ministry.

"He had an earnest desire that the pure gospel should remain among his people, after he was taken away. For this purpose he surmounted great difficulties in building the house in *Madeley Wood*. He not only saved for it the last farthing he had, but when he was abroad proposed to let the Vicarage-House, (designing at his return to live in a little cottage near it)

and appropriating the rent of it for clearing that house.

“ Since the time I had the honour and happiness of living with him, every day made me more sensible of the mighty work of the Spirit upon him. The fruits of this were manifest in all his life and conversation, but in nothing more than in his meekness and humility. It was a meekness which no affront could move: an humility which loved to be unknown, forgotten and despised.* How hard is it to find an eminent person who loves an Equal? But his delight was, in preferring others to himself. It appeared so natural in him, that it seemed as his meat, to set every one before himself. He spake not of the fault of an absent person, but when necessary; and then with the utmost caution. He made no account of his own labours, and perhaps carried to an extreme, his dislike of hearing them mentioned.

“ Patience is the daughter of Humility. In him it discovered itself in a manner which I wish I could either describe or imitate. It produced in him a ready mind to embrace every Cross with alacrity and pleasure. And for the good of his neighbour, (the poor in particular) nothing seemed hard, nothing wearisome. When I have been grieved to call him out of his study, from his closet-work two or three times in an hour, he would answer, “ O my Dear, never think of that: it matters not what we do, so we are always ready to meet the will of God: ’tis only conformity to this, which makes any employment excellent.

* I think this was going to an extreme.

" He had a singular love for the Lambs of the flock, the Children, and applied himself with the greatest diligence to their instruction, for which he had a peculiar gift: and this populous parish found him full exercise for it. The poorest met with the same attention from him as the rich. For their sakes he almost grudged himself necessities, and often expressed a pain in using them, while any of his parish wanted them.

" But while I mention his meekness and love, let me not forget the peculiar favour of his Master, in giving him the most firm and resolute courage. In reproving sin and daring sinners; he was a *Son of Thunder*, and regarded neither fear nor favour, when he had a message from God to deliver.

" With respect to his communion with God, 'tis much to be lamented that we have no account of it from his own pen. But thus far I can say, it was his constant care, to keep an uninterrupted sense of the Divine presence. In order to this he was slow of speech, and had the exactest government of his words. To this he was so inwardly attentive, as sometimes to appear stupid to those who knew him not: though few conversed in a more lively manner, when he judged it would be for the glory of God. It was his continual endeavour to draw up his own and every other spirit, to an immediate intercourse with God. And all his intercourse with me, was so mingled with prayer and praise, that every employment and every meal, was as it were, perfumed therewith. He often said, " 'Tis a very little thing, so to hang upon God by faith, as to feel no departure from him. But I want to be filled with the fulness
of

of his spirit. I feel, said he, sometimes such gleams of light, as it were wafts of heavenly air, as seem ready to take my soul with them to glory. A little before his last illness, when the fever began to rage among us, he preached a sermon on the duty of visiting the sick, wherein he said, What do you fear? Are you afraid of catching the distemper and dying! O fear it no more! What an honour to die in your Master's work! If permitted to me, I should account it a singular favour." In his former illness he wrote thus, "I calmly wait in unshaken resignation, for the full salvation of God; ready to venture on his faithful love, and on the sure mercies of David. His time is best, and is my time: Death has lost its sting. And I bless God, I know not what hurry of spirits is, or unbelieving fears."

"For his last months he scarce ever lay down or rose up without these words in his mouth,

I nothing have, I nothing am,
My treasure's in the bleeding Lamb
Both now and evermore.

"In one of the letters which he wrote some time since to his dear people of *Madeley*, some of his words are, "I leave this blessed Island for awhile; but I trust I shall never leave the kingdom of God—the shadow of Christ's Cross, the clefts of the Rock, smitten and pierced for us. There I meet you in spirit: thence I trust I shall joyfully leap into the ocean of eternity, to go and join those ministering spirits, who wait on the heirs of salvation. And if I am no more allowed to minister to you on earth, I rejoice at the thought, that I shall perhaps be
allowed

allowed to accompany the angels, who (if you abide in the faith) will be commissioned to carry you into Abraham's bosom."

"The thought enlivens my faith! Lord give me to walk in his steps! Then shall I see him again, and my heart shall rejoice, and we shall eternally behold the Lamb together. Faith brings near the welcome moment! And now He beckons me away! And Jesus bids me come!"

I know not that any thing can or need be added to this, but Mrs. *Fletcher's* Account of his Death: which follows also in her own words.

"For some time before his late illness, he was particularly penetrated with the nearness of eternity. There was scarce an hour in which he was not calling upon us, to drop every thought and every care, that we might attend to nothing, but drinking deeper into God. We spent much time in wrestling with God, and were led in a peculiar manner, to abandon our whole selves into the hands of God, to do or suffer whatever was pleasing to him.

"On Thursday, Aug. 4, he was employed in the work of God; from three in the afternoon till nine at night. When he came home he said, "I have taken cold." On Friday and Saturday he was not well, but seemed uncommonly drawn out in prayer. On Saturday night his fever appeared very strong. I begged him not to go to church in the morning: but he told me, "It was the will of the Lord;" in which case I never dared to persuade. In reading prayers, he almost fainted away. I got through the croud, and intreated him to come out of the desk. But he let me and others know,

know, in his sweet manner, that we were not to interrupt the order of God. I then retired to my pew, where all around me were in tears. When he was a little recovered by the windows being opened he went on; - and then preached with a strength and recollection that surprised us all.

"After Sermon he went up to the Communion Table with these words, "I am going to throw myself under the wings of the Cherubim, before the Mercy-seat." The service held till near Two. Sometimes he could scarce stand, and was often obliged to stop. The people were deeply affected: weeping was on every side. Gracious Lord! How was it my soul kept so calm in the midst of the most tender feelings? Notwithstanding his extreme weakness, he gave out several verses of hymns, and lively sentences of exhortation. When service was over, we hurried him to bed, where he immediately fainted away. He afterward dropt into a sleep for some time, and on waking cried out with a pleasant smile, "Now, my Dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lord's work: he never fails me when I trust in him." Having got a little dinner, he dozed most of the evening, now and then waking full of the praises of God. At night his fever returned, though not violent; but his strength decreased amazingly. On Monday and Tuesday we had a little paradise together: he lay on a couch in the study and though often changing posture, was sweetly pleasant, and frequently slept a good while. When awake, he delighted in hearing me read hymns and tracts on Faith and Love. His words were all animating, and his patience beyond expression. When he had any nauseous medicine

medicines to take, he seemed to enjoy the cross, according to a word he used often to repeat, that we are to seek a perfect conformity to the will of God, and leave him to give us what comfort he saw good. I asked him, whether he had any advice to leave me, if he should be taken from me? He replied, "I have nothing particular to say: the Lord will open all before thee." I said, "Have you any conviction, that God is about to take you?" He said, "No, not in particular: only I always see Death so inexpressibly near, that we both seem to stand on the very verge of eternity." While he slept a little, I besought the Lord, if it was his good pleasure, to spare him to me a little longer. But my prayer seemed to have no wings, and I could not help mingling continually therewith, "Lord, give me perfect resignation." This uncertainty made me tremble, lest God was going to put into my hand, the bitter cup with which he lately threatened my husband. Some weeks before, I myself was ill of the fever. My husband then felt the whole parting scene, and struggled for perfect resignation. He said, "O Polly, shall I ever see the day when thou must be carried out to bury? How will the little things which thy tender care has prepared for me in every part of the house, how will they wound and distress me? How is it? I think, I feel jealousy! I am jealous of the worms. I seem to shrink at giving my dear Polly to the worms!"

"Now all these reflections returned upon my heart, with the weight of a millstone. I cried to the Lord, and those words were deeply impressed on my spirit, *Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my glory.* This promise

promise was full of comfort to my soul. I saw that in Christ's immediate presence was our home, and that we should find our re-union in being deeply centered in Him. I received it as a fresh marriage for eternity. As such, I trust for ever to hold it. All that day, whenever I thought of that expression, *to behold my glory*, it seemed to wipe away every tear, and was as the ring whereby we were joined anew.

"Awaking some time after he said, "Polly, I have been thinking, it was Israel's fault, that they asked for *signs*. We will not do so, but abandoning our whole selves into the hands of God, will lie patiently before him, assured that he will do all things well."

"My dear Love, said I, if ever I have done or said any thing to grieve thee, how will the remembrance wound my heart, shouldst thou be taken from me?"

"He intreated and charged me, with inexpressible tenderness, not to allow the thought; declaring his thankfulness for our union, in a variety of words written on my heart as with the adamant pen of friendship deeply dipped in blood."

"On Wednesday, after groaning all day under the weight of the power of God, he told me he had received such a manifestation of the full meaning of those words, *God is Love*, as he could never be able to tell. "*It fills me*, said he, *every moment*. O Polly, my dear Polly, *God is Love*." Shout, shout aloud! I want a gift of praise to go to the ends of the earth. But it seems as if I could not speak much longer. Let us fix on a sign between ourselves: (tapping me twice with his fingers) now I mean, "*God is Love*. And we will draw each other into God. Observe

Observe! By this we will draw each other into God."

"Sally coming in, he cried out, "O Sally, God is Love. Shout both of you: I want to hear you, shout his praise." All this time the medical friend who diligently attended him, hoped he was in no danger; as he had no bad head-ach, much sleep, without the least delirium, and an almost regular pulse. So was the disease, though commissioned to take his life, restrained by the power of God.

"On Thursday his speech began to fail. While he was able, he spoke to all that came in his way. Hearing a stranger was in the house, he ordered her to be called up, though uttering two sentences almost made him faint. To his friendly Doctor he would not be silent, while he had any power of speech: after saying, "O Sir, you take much thought for my body: give me leave to take thought for your soul." When I could scarce understand any thing he said, I spoke these words, *God is Love*. Instantly, as if all his powers were awakened, he broke out in a rapture, "God is Love! Love! Love! O for that gust of praise I want to sound!"—Here his voice again failed. He suffered many ways; but with such patience, as none but those then present can conceive. If I named his sufferings, he would smile and make the sign.

"On Friday, finding his body covered with spots, I felt a sword pierce through my soul. As I was kneeling by his side with my hand in his, entreating the Lord to be with us in this tremendous hour, he strove to say many things, but could not: pressing my hand, and often repeating the sign. At last he breathed out, *Head*
C of

of the Church, be Head to my Wife! When for a few moments I was forced to leave him, Sally said to him, "My dear Master, do you know me?" He replied, "Sally, God will put his right hand under you." She added, "O my dear Master, should you be taken away, what a disconsolate creature will my poor dear Mistress be?" He replied, "God will be her all in all." He had always delighted much in those words,

"Jesu's blood through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries."

Whenever I repeated them to him, he would answer, *Boundless! boundless! boundless!* He now added, though with great difficulty,

"Mercy's full power I *soon* shall prove,
Loved with an everlasting love."

"On Saturday afternoon his fever seemed quite off, and a few friends standing near the bed, he reached his hand to each, and looking on a Minister, said, "Are you ready to assist to-morrow?" His recollection surprised us, as the day of the week had not been named in his room. Many believed he would recover: and one said, "Do you think the Lord will raise you up?" He strove to answer, saying, "Raise me in the resurr"—meaning in the resurrection. To another, asking the same question, he said, *I leave it all to God.*

"In the evening, the fever returned with violence, and the mucus falling on his throat almost strangled him. It was supposed the same painful emotion, would grow more and more violent to the last. As I felt this exquisitely, I
cried

cried to the Lord to remove it; and glory be to his name, he did. From that time it returned no more. As night drew on, I perceived him dying very fast. His fingers could hardly make the sign, (which he scarce ever forgot) and his speech seemed quite gone. I said, "My dear creature, I ask not for myself, *I know thy soul*; but for the sake of others. If Jesus is very present with thee, lift thy right hand." He did. "If the prospect of glory sweetly opens before thee, repeat the sign." He immediately raised it again: and in half a minute, a second time: he then threw it up, as if he would reach the top of the bed. After this, his dear hands moved no more: but on my saying, "Art thou in much pain? He answered, No." From this time he lay in a kind of sleep, though with his eyes open and fixt. For the most part he sat upright against pillows, with his head a little inclining to one side. And so remarkably composed and triumphant was his countenance, that the least trace of death was scarce discernible in it.

"Twenty-four hours he was in this situation, breathing like a person in common sleep. About thirty-five minutes past ten on Sunday night, August 14th, his precious soul entered into the joy of his Lord, without one struggle or groan, in the fifty-sixth year of his age.

"And here I break off my mournful story: but on my bleeding heart, the fair picture of his heavenly excellence will be for ever drawn. When I call to mind his ardent zeal, his laborious endeavours to seek and save the lost, his diligence in the employment of his time, his Christ-like condescension toward me, and his uninterrupted converse with heaven: I may well be allowed to add, my loss is beyond the

power of words to paint. I have gone *through deep waters* : but all my afflictions were nothing compared to this. Well : I want no pleasant prospect, but upwards : nor any thing whereon to fix my hope, but immortality.

" On the 17th, his dear remains were deposited in *Madeley Church-yard*, amid the tears and lamentations of thousands. The service was performed by the Rev. Mr. *Hatton*, Rector of *Waters-Upton*, whom God enabled to speak in a pathetic manner to his weeping flock. In the conclusion, at my request, he read the following paper.

" As it was the desire of my beloved Husband to be buried in this plain manner, so out of tenderness he begged that I might not be present. And in all things I would obey him.

" Permit me then by the mouth of a friend, to bear my open testimony, to the glory of God, that I who have known him in the most perfect manner, am constrained to declare, that I never knew any one walk so closely in the ways of God as he did. The Lord gave him a conscience, tender as the apple of an eye. He literally preferred the interest of every one to his own.

" He was rigidly just, but perfectly loose from all attachment to the world. He shared *his all* with the poor, who lay so close to his heart, that at the approach of death, when he could not speak without difficulty, he cried out, "*O my poor ! What will become of my poor ?*" He was blest with so great a degree of humility as is scarce to be found. I am witness, how often he has rejoiced, in being treated with contempt. Indeed it seemed the very food of

his soul, to be little and unknown. When he desired me to write a line to his Brother, if he died, I replying, " I will write him all the Lord's dealings with thee:" " No, no, said he: write nothing about me. I only desire to be forgotten. *God is all!*"

" His zeal for souls I need not tell you. Let the labours of twenty-five years, and a Martyr's death in the conclusion, imprint it on your hearts. His diligent visitation of the sick occasioned the fever, which by God's commission tore him from you and me. And his vehement desire to take his last leave of you, with dying lips and hands, gave it is supposed the finishing stroke, by preparing his blood for putrefaction. Thus has he lived and died your Servant. And will any of you refuse to meet him at God's right hand in that day?

" He walked with death always in sight. About two months ago he came to me and said, " My dear Love, I know not how it is, but I have a strange impression, Death is very near us, as if it would be some sudden stroke upon one of us. And it draws out all my soul in prayer, that we may be ready. He then broke out, " Lord, prepare the soul thou wilt call. And O stand by the poor disconsolate one that shall be left behind!"

" A few days before his departure, he was filled with love in an uncommon manner, saying to me, " I have had such a discovery of the depth of that word, *God is Love*, I cannot tell thee half. O shout his praise." The same he testified, as long as he had a voice, and continued to testify to the end, by a most lamb-like patience, in which he smiled over death,
and

and set his last seal to the glorious truths he had so long preached among you."

"Three years, nine months and two days, I have possessed my heavenly-minded husband. But now the sun of my earthly joy is set for ever, and my soul filled with an anguish, which only finds its consolation in a real resignation to the will of God. When I was asking the Lord, if he pleased to spare him to me a little longer, the following promise was impress'd on my mind with great power (in the accomplishment of which I look for our re-union) "Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my glory." Lord, hasten the hour."

There is little need of adding any farther character of this man of God, to the foregoing account, given by one who wrote out of the fulness of her heart. I would only observe, that for many years I despaired of finding any inhabitant of *Great-Britain*, that could stand in any degree of comparison, with *Gregory Lopez*, or *Monsieur de Renty*. But let any impartial person judge, if *Mr. Fletcher* was at all inferior to them? Did he not experience as deep communion with God, and as high a measure of inward Holiness, as was experienced either by one or the other of those burning and shining lights? And it is certain his outward Holiness shone before men, with full as bright a lustre as theirs. But if any should attempt to draw a parallel between them, there are two circumstances that deserve consideration. One is, we are not assured, that the Writers of *their* lives, did not extenuate, if not suppress what was amiss in them. And some things amiss we are assured there were, namely, many touches of Superstition, and some of Idolatry, in worshipping

Saints

Saints, the Virgin Mary in particular. But I have not suppressed or extenuated any thing in Mr. Fletcher's Character. For indeed I knew nothing that was amiss, nothing that needed to be extenuated, much less suppressed. A second circumstance is, that the Writers of *their* lives, could not have so full a knowledge of them, as both Mrs. Fletcher and I had of Mr. Fletcher's, being both eye and ear-witnesses of his whole conduct. Consequently we know, that his Life was not sullied with any mixture of either Idolatry or Superstition. I was intimately acquainted with him for above thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon, and night, without the least reserve, during a journey of many hundred miles. And in all that time, I never heard him speak one improper word, nor saw him do an improper action.—To conclude. Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within fourscore years. But one equal to him, I have not known: one so inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. So unblameable a character in every respect I have not found either in *Europe* or *America*. And I scarce expect to find another such, on this side of Eternity.

But it is possible we all may be such as he was. Let us then endeavour to follow him as he followed Christ!

Norwich, Oct. 24, 1785.

HIS E P I T A P H.

Here lies the Body of
The Rev. JOHN WILLIAM de la FLECHERE,
Vicar of Madeley,
Who was born at Nyon, in Switzerland,
September the 12th, 1729,
And finished his course August the 14th, 1785
In this Village,
Where his unexampled Labours
Will never be forgotten.
He exercised his Ministry for the space of
Twenty-five Years
In this Parish,
With uncommon Zeal and Ability.
But though many believed his report,
Yet he might with justice have adopted
The Lamentation of the Prophet,
All the Day long have I stretched out my Hand
Unto a disobedient and gainsaying People:
Yet for my Judgment is with the Lord,
And my Work with my God.

